

News Release

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Service Broadens Protections, Partnerships for Endangered U.S.-Canada Caribou

Southern mountain caribou to benefit from binational conservation effort

BOISE, Idaho – Southern mountain caribou, wide-hoofed members of the deer family are in steep decline. Binational collaboration between the United States and Canada may provide the best chance of recovering these high-elevation, snow-dependent animals.

In 1983, the southern Selkirk Mountains subpopulation was listed as endangered in northern Idaho, northeastern Washington, and southern British Columbia, Canada, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In response to a 2012 petition to delist the southern Selkirk Mountains subpopulation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service carefully assessed the best available information for the listed entity in light of the 1996 distinct population segment (DPS) policy. The Service is announcing a final rule describing the entire southern mountain caribou DPS, which includes the southern Selkirk Mountains subpopulation, and other subpopulations in portions of British Columbia. In this rule, the Service also reaffirms critical habitat designated in 2012.

Under the ESA, a DPS is a portion of a species or subspecies that may exhibit unique behaviors and whose range occurs in a distinct ecological setting. Southern mountain caribou are unique in that they occupy high elevation, forested areas with deep snowfall along the inland temperate rainforest. In addition, they do not make the long distance migrations of other woodland caribou, rather they migrate vertically up and down the mountains several times a year between seasonal use areas, feeding solely on tree lichens during winter. Both the distribution and abundance of southern mountain caribou has declined substantially since the time of European settlement, with the current abundance estimated at fewer than 1,200 animals. Historically, southern mountain caribou existed in an interconnected population, but this population was fragmented into 17 isolated subpopulations, some of which no longer persist.

The Service and its partners are working collaboratively to address threats from habitat loss and modification that are leading to increased predation by gray wolves, cougars, bears, and other large carnivores. The Service's ESA decision will generate timely attention, resources, and partnerships directed toward ensuring southern mountain caribou are recovered. As subpopulations in Canada recover, individuals are expected to move between countries as they have traditionally done.

"We are committed to strengthening our collaboration with our Canadian partners on the recovery of this critically endangered animal in both the United States and Canada," said Christopher Swanson, Acting State Supervisor for the Service's Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office. "We also want to recognize the collaborative efforts of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, and other members of the Selkirk Caribou International Team Working Group to conserve caribou in the Idaho Panhandle and across the border into Canada and northeastern Washington."

For more information about southern mountain caribou and to read the Federal Register notice, please visit: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>. Information about critical habitat is available at: <http://go.usa.gov/3GTdj>. For the Service's DPS policy, go to: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/laws-policies/policy-distinct-vertebrate.html>.

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